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C O N F I D E N T I A L DHAKA 000564

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/30/2016

TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [BG](#) [BG](#) [BGD](#)

SUBJECT: SCA A/S ROCCA'S MEETING WITH AWAMI LEAGUE LEADER

Classified By: CDA Judith Chammas, reasons para 1.4 b, d.

1. (C) Summary: Sheikh Hasina complained that the ruling BNP-JI coalition seeks to eliminate all opposition in the run-up to the next election, and that given a free and fair choice, the Bangladeshi people would naturally choose the Awami League as their leaders. However, she declined to make a clear commitment to participate fully in the current session of parliament, and did not rule out boycotting the election. End Summary.

2. (C) On January 27, Assistant Secretary for South Asia Christina Rocca, Charge Judith Chammas, and Conoff (notetaker) met for one hour and fifteen minutes with opposition Awami League (AL) president Sheikh Hasina and a room full of AL officials.

3. (C) Hasina began with a rehash of her litany of complaints against the current government: it is orchestrating a campaign of elimination, not intimidation aimed at the opposition, the Election Commission has been stacked in favor of the ruling party, and investigations into recent attacks are stalled or whitewashed to cover up the real culprits. BNP coalition partner Jamaat Islami (JI), she said, has ties to all the terrorist groups in Bangladesh.

4. (C) She also pointed to recent political developments to argue that the people of Bangladesh, given the opportunity, would repudiate terrorism and support the Awami League. In the recent by-election in Dinajpur, she noted, the favored JI candidate was decisively defeated by a third party candidate, and in Bangladesh's second city, Chittagong, a mayoral election resulted in a victory for the Awami League.

5. (C) A/S Rocca pressed Hasina to commit to participating in the current session of parliament, as well as in the upcoming election, without resorting to a campaign of boycotts. Hasina demurred. Despite worrying about their own security and whether they would be allowed to speak in Parliament, Hasina said, "we can take that chance." She reiterated that the single most important prerequisite for participating in the electoral process is a reasonably level playing field. These conditions did not currently exist, she said, because the Electoral Commission has been staffed with political appointees who owe their allegiance to the BNP.

6. (C) At the end of the meeting, A/S Rocca stated that the international community expects there to be free and fair elections in Bangladesh, that all democratic forces will participate, and that we will support international observers.

7. (U) A/S Rocca cleared this message.
CHAMMAS